



Testimony Regarding H.B. 7027: The Governor's Proposed Budget for the Judicial Department

Alexandra Ricks
Appropriations Committee
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Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, and the esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Alexandra Ricks, and I am an Associate Policy Fellow testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective that the funding proposed in the Governor's budget for youth programs should be preserved. The Judicial Department provides most of the juvenile justice services in the state.¹ Its work—and the resources it has to do this work—are necessary to meet the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee's (JJPOC) goal to increase the diversion of at-risk youth from the juvenile justice system by meeting the youth's needs through community-based services.² Research shows that this goal is important because youth outcomes related to education, employment, and future reliance on social services are predicted by juvenile justice involvement.³ In order to divert youth from this system we need a robust network of community-based programs and supports.

Last year, the funds appropriated to the Judicial Department were cut by \$77 million or 13%.⁴ This reduction adversely impacted programs serving youth, such as the broad variety of local services provided to youth under the Juvenile Alternative Incarceration line item, which was cut by nearly \$8 million or 28%, after holdbacks.⁵ This includes programs that provided services ranging from substance abuse treatment to career training for at-risk youth. We at Voices are still gravely concerned about these cuts, which will continue under the Governor's proposed budget for FY 2018.

¹ "Connecticut's Juvenile Justice System: Progress and Challenges for 2016 and Beyond," Tow Youth Justice Institute (March 2016), <http://www.newhaven.edu/1010897.pdf>.

² The JJPOC also has goals to reduce incarceration and recidivism rates for youth.

³ Gary Sweeten, "Who will graduate? Disruption of high school education by arrest and court involvement," *Justice Quarterly* 23.4 (2006): 462-480.; Paul Hirschfield, "Another Way Out: The Impact of Juvenile Arrests on High School Dropout," *Sociology of Education* 82, no. 4 (October 1, 2009): 368-93.; Bruce Western and Katherine Beckett, "How Unregulated is the U.S. Labor Market? The Penal System as a Labor Market Institution," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 104, No. 4, 1999.

⁴ For FY 2017. Source: Keith M. Phaneuf, "Judicial Branch to Close Windham Courthouse, 3 Juvenile Courts," *CT Mirror*, June 14, 2016, <http://ctmirror.org/2016/06/14/judicial-branch-to-close-windham-courthouse-3-juvenile-courts/>; Connecticut General Assembly. *An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium ending June 30, 2017, 2016 May Special Session*, <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2016/ACT/pa/2016PA-00002-R00SB-00501SS1-PA.htm>.

⁵ Between FY 2016 Budgeted and after holdbacks from FY 2017 Appropriations. Source: Office of Fiscal Analysis of the Connecticut General Assembly Judicial and Corrections Subcommittee Budget Sheet https://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/Misc/2016MISC-20161004_Agency%20Budget%20Sheets.pdf

The importance of keeping youth out of the juvenile justice system and, when they do become involved, keeping them at the lowest levels of involvement, cannot be overstated. First, youth who have spent time incarcerated are more likely to drop out of high school, less likely to find employment, and more likely to be homeless upon re-entry than youth who have not spent time in detention.⁶ Additionally, cost benefit analyses show that therapeutic alternatives to incarceration save states money through reduced recidivism and incarceration rates.⁷ This is in contrast with incarceration, which is expensive; in Connecticut, the cost of detaining one youth at the Connecticut Juvenile Training School is \$750 daily or \$546,405 annually.⁸ We must be investing in these at-risk children through cheaper, more preventive options, in order to avoid higher costs later on. In order to do this, the funds proposed by the Governor's budget to support the Judicial Department's juvenile justice services should be maintained.

Importantly, this system of diversion also includes other programs outside the Judicial Department. This is a holistic system of programs and services that start in communities and schools to meet the needs of at-risk youth before risks and behaviors escalate. For example, as a colleague of mine testified during the hearing for the Governor's proposed State Department of Education budget, cuts to other services that provide early intervention—such as the School Based Diversion Initiative (to reduce school-based arrests), Neighborhood Youth Centers, and Family Resource Centers—also undermine these diversion efforts and increase the risk that youth will develop very serious needs. Cuts to these programs endanger the progress we have made in reducing the number of children caught up in the juvenile justice system in Connecticut. The diversionary services provided under the Judicial Department's Court Support Services Division are crucial to maintaining this progress.

In sum, Connecticut is considered a national leader in reforming its juvenile justice system. To continue improving outcomes for all youth, we need to invest in diversionary programs that provide the services they need and keep them on the right track. This requires maintaining and enhancing these services as an investment in the future of our children.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am happy to answer any questions, and I can be reached at aricks@ctvoices.org or (203-498-4240 ext. 115).

⁶ "Back on Track: Supporting Youth Reentry from Out-of-Home Placement to the Community," Youth Reentry Task Force of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Coalition (Fall 2009), http://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource_1397.pdf.

⁷ "Evidence-Based Juvenile Offender Programs: Program Description, Quality Assurance, and Cost," Washington State Institute for Public Policy (June 2007), http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/986/Wsipp_Evidence-Based-Juvenile-Offender-Programs-Program-Description-Quality-Assurance-and-Cost_Full-Report.pdf; "Cost-Benefit Analysis of Juvenile Justice Programs: Juvenile Justice Guidebook for Legislators," National Conference of State Legislatures (November 2011) <http://www.ncsl.org/documents/cj/jjguidebook-costbenefit.pdf>.

⁸ Connecticut's Juvenile Justice System: Progress and Challenges for 2016 and Beyond," Tow Youth Justice Institute (March 2016), <http://www.newhaven.edu/1010897.pdf>.